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LIVESTOCK DEVELOPMENTS IN COLOMBIA

The livestock industry of Colombia is on the threshold of a potentially large-scale development that will assist materially toward the diversification of Colombian agriculture and make the economy less dependent on coffee production. Livestock raising has possibly the greatest natural advantages and the greatest potentialities for growth of any of the major Colombian agricultural activities.

Cattle numbers, now estimated at from 10 to 12 million, have declined sharply during the past three to four years due to political disturbances and other reasons, but are expected to increase rapidly for the next few years. Numbers of other types of livestock except draft animals have already begun an upward trend. Measures taken during the past year to encourage increases in livestock production and an improvement in the quality of Colombian livestock include: Increasing the amount of credit available to the livestock industry and making credit terms more attractive; encouraging the importation of purebred stock by providing for long-term loans of up to 100 percent of the value and by tax concessions; establishing additional departmental livestock credit associations; purchasing purebred animals for resale to colonists; consideration of a plan for large-scale importation of commercial grade heifers, and making preliminary plans to establish a National Federation of Livestock Producers with sufficient capital and authority to make a substantial contribution to the development of the industry.

Livestock Numbers

Unofficial estimates of livestock numbers in Colombia as of January 1, 1953 and 1954 are reported as follows, in thousands:

	<u>January, 1953</u>	<u>January, 1954</u>
Cattle	13,000	13,650
Hogs	2,378	2,500
Sheep	1,465	1,550
Goats	682	715
Horses	1,129	1,129
Mules and Asses	775	775
Poultry	24,000	25,200

Source: , Ministry of Agriculture

There is considerable divergence of opinion among livestock producers as to the accuracy of the Ministry's estimates which are generally considered to be inflated. Private estimates in some instances are as low as 8 million head of cattle but the consensus among livestock producers and farm organization leaders is that the cattle population is somewhere between 10 and 12 million.

The Government has hopes that accurate livestock numbers will shortly be available as a survey using a sampling method has recently been completed under the supervision of an FAO statistician. A trial enumeration using this method was carried out in the Department of Valle a year ago and was reported to have been very successful. It is believed that the sampling method will provide more accurate results than a full scale census in a country such as Colombia where many herds are located in remote and inaccessible areas and where producers are extremely reluctant to divulge the number of cattle owned. The results of the 1951 census, for example, were so obviously inaccurate that the Government refused to allow their publication. The situation was complicated at that time, however, by substantial political unrest in many important livestock areas.

The Ministry believes that cattle numbers are currently increasing at the rate of five percent per year. The same percentage increase is believed to apply to hogs, sheep, goats and poultry. Numbers of draft animals appear to be merely holding steady.

The previously mentioned political unrest, which in many important livestock producing regions broke out into guerrilla warfare, resulted in substantial reductions in cattle numbers between 1950 and mid-1953, as well as in the abandonment of farms and ranches on a large-scale in many regions. Now after the end of the fighting and with reduced political tensions, most cattlemen have returned to their ranches and are rebuilding their herds. Furthermore, potential investors are again willing to put money into cattle, after a long period when the risks of total loss were considered so grave as virtually to shut off all investment in that field.

Livestock Improvement Programs

Great interest is being shown in improving Colombian livestock by importing breeding stock. During 1953 four hundred purebred bulls and 2,935 purebred females were imported, almost a third of which came from the United States. These figures will be substantially exceeded in 1954 according to present indications.

During the past several months the government has undertaken a number of measures designed to stimulate imports of purebred cattle. A substantial proportion of the proceeds of the recently established coffee export charge has been specifically earmarked for use as loans to cattlemen who wish to import breeding stock. These loans will be made through the new Coffee

Bank for a period of not to exceed five years at six percent interest per year. Although the exact sum to be reserved for this purpose has not yet been disclosed it is expected to reach several million dollars by the end of the year.

The Caja de Credito Agrario (Agricultural Bank) has also been authorized to make five-year loans for imports of cattle and the government is expected to place additional funds at the disposal of the Caja within the near future in order to increase substantially the amounts available for this purpose. The Caja has recently been authorized to make loans of up to 100 percent of the total value of the animals imported, and to increase to 25,000 pesos the maximum amount which it can lend to any one individual. The same decree permits the importers of purebred bulls to deduct the value of such animals from taxable assets during a period of five years following importation.

A proposal to import large numbers--in excess of 100,000 per year--of commercial heifers into Colombia has received a great deal of publicity in recent months but relatively little has been accomplished in the way of concrete planning for such a program. The pro's and con's as to the feasibility of such large-scale imports as a means of giving a quick boost to depleted cattle numbers in Colombia have been under discussion for several months. The scheme was not taken very seriously, however, until President Rojas dramatically announced to a group of breed association representatives from Texas that he was interested in working out a plan for importing up to a million head of cattle within the next five to ten years and asked their assistance in making plans for such a project.

Apparently the President had originally contemplated that the program would be organized and carried out by the Institute of Colonization and Immigration. The Institute would stock its own projects with imported cattle and would sell the remainder to individual cattlemen. The government soon decided, however, that this plan was not feasible and that the Institute would import only the cattle needed for its own projects and, for the time being at least individual producers would be allowed to arrange for their own imports, financing them through the Caja Agraria or the Coffee Bank.

It is still an open question as to whether an official or semi-official organization such as the Caja Agraria or the proposed Federation of Livestock Producers, will be given the authority to organize mass importations of commercial cattle. The breed associations and leading livestock breeders are almost unanimously opposed to such a scheme. They claim that given ample credit facilities and an improved disease prevention and control program Colombia's livestock producers will increase the size of their herds with sufficient rapidity and with less risk of introducing new diseases into the country. However, the producers strongly support all measures designed to encourage importations of purebred stock.

The government prohibited the slaughter of all cows capable of reproduction that were less than eight years old and the sterilization of cows or heifers of any age. ^{1/} This measure was almost unanimously opposed by livestock producers who maintained that they almost never sell good female breeding stock if they can afford to feed and keep them. If the government were able to enforce effectively such a law, which they considered doubtful, it would prove a severe hardship on many producers. Although the measure remains in force, reports indicate that it is not being strictly observed, although it is still too early to judge the ultimate effectiveness of that decree.

During the summer of 1954 President Rojas appointed a commission to draw up plans for the organization of a National Federation of Livestock Producers to be patterned after the powerful and successful National Coffee Federation. The functions of the proposed new Federation were tentatively established as follows: (1) to acquire, import, export, sell and distribute livestock of all types; (2) to buy, import and sell selected grass seeds; (3) to establish artificial insemination stations; (4) to import, produce, sell, and distribute all types of forage and feedstuffs, drugs and other veterinary products, and to act as the representative of either domestic or foreign firms producing these products.

The proposed Federation is expected to be capitalized initially at 100,000,000 pesos, part of which will be subscribed by the national government and the remainder by semi-official or private organizations or individuals. In his inauguration speech of August 7 President Rojas stated that the government intended to proceed with the organization of this Federation with all possible speed.

Import Restrictions

In an effort to bring down prices of basic food products the Colombian Government in recent months removed import restrictions or lowered import duties on a number of food items including many livestock products. As a result of those measures and of high prices for domestically produced livestock products, imports of canned and processed meats, sausages, and eggs have increased substantially in recent months. In addition early this year the Corporation for the Defense of Agriculture Products imported a large quantity of corned beef from Uruguay and both CARE and UNICEF have initiated programs in Colombia for the distribution of surplus dry milk and cheese donated by the United States Government.

Except for animal fats and animal fibers, imports of livestock products in recent years have consisted almost exclusively of powdered and condensed milk, which have declined substantially during the past two years and totaled only 9 million pounds in 1953.

^{1/} Decree No. 1991, June 30, 1954.

Cattle Exports

Exports of live cattle, destined chiefly for the Dutch West Indies, Martinique, Guadeloupe and, until the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Colombia in 1951, Venezuela, have averaged approximately 2-1/2 million pesos in value annually in recent years. The value of such exports diminished to 1.8 million pesos in 1953, due partly to high domestic meat prices and partly to the prohibition on exports of any animal susceptible to foot-and-mouth disease which became effective on December 2, 1953. This prohibition continues in force and is likely to be maintained for some time to come.

No other livestock products are exported in appreciable quantities.

Slaughter and Meat Production

The Ministry of Agriculture has recently released an estimate of cattle slaughter in 1953 of 1,352,676 head, a reduction of 68,000 head from the number slaughtered in 1952 and a decline of over 100,000 head from the 1951 slaughter. No estimates of slaughter of other types of meat animals in 1953 have yet been released by the Ministry of Agriculture. Beef and veal production during 1953 was estimated at around 600 million pounds, dressed weight.

Data for tax-paid slaughter during 1953 furnished by the National Statistics Department on the basis of reports from municipalities are 1,305,341 cattle, 698,669 hogs, 93,712 sheep and 9,944 goats. It will be noted that the number of cattle slaughtered is smaller than the Ministry's estimates because reports were not received from ten municipalities.

No detailed estimates of production of other livestock products have been made by the Government for any year since 1951. However, production in 1953 of some important livestock products are estimated as follows: total milk production, approximately 4.5 billion pounds of which about ten percent was sold as fluid milk; 600,000,000 eggs; 70 million pounds of poultry meat; 77 million of tallow; 33 million pounds of lard; and 4.4 million pounds of wool.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Campaign

Progress in the Ministry of Agriculture's campaign against foot-and-mouth disease in Colombia has been spotty. The disease has been brought fairly well under control in most of central Colombia but new outbreaks have occurred in a number of areas that were previously free from infection. Outbreaks have occurred in the Departments of Bolivar, Atlantico and Magdalena. It was hoped that rigid quarantine measures would keep the disease out of the important livestock raising department of Cordoba but these efforts were unsuccessful and that entire department is now considered to be an infected area. Other newly infected areas include north central Antioquia, the Popayan area of Cauca, and the north eastern half of Huila.

Intensive vaccination campaigns are being carried on in all these newly infected areas and an average of about 400,000 doses of vaccine are being administered each month. The vaccine is still obtained from Italian sources as further delays have been encountered in the domestic vaccine production program. Vaccine is now being produced by a government laboratory, but the first large-scale tests indicated that it is not yet as efficacious as the imported product. It may still be several months, therefore, before production of the national vaccine begins on a large scale.

Campaign officials' hopes of obtaining sufficient money, personnel, authority, and cooperation to wipe out the disease in Colombia within the foreseeable future have diminished but they believe that the vigorous vaccination program now being carried on will permit the disease to be brought fairly well under control within a few months. Past experience since the outbreak of the disease early in 1951 would appear to indicate that even this modest goal may not be reached. About the only consolation to the livestock industry is that the disease takes a relatively mild form in Colombia, with a low mortality rate.

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